

Skepticism Rising High over Tri-State, Xcel Plan

\$180 million project not necessary, many residents say

By Bill Knowles

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WALSENBURG – A planned project to move electrical power from the San Luis valley to the Comanche substation in Pueblo has drawn some public skepticism from county residents in Gardner, La Veta and Walsenburg as well as residents that live in the various subdivisions out in the county.

Tri-State and Xcel took their presentation on the road Wednesday, Aug. 19 answering questions and making their pitch. Gardner saw about 40 people show up at the public scoping meeting Wednesday morning with about 75 people making the meeting at the Huerfano County Community Center in Walsenburg Wednesday evening.

With both the federal and state governments mandating a reduction in the use of carbon based fuels to generate portions of the nation's electrical needs and phasing in the use of renewable energy to generate power, Tri-State and Xcel are looking at solar energy power generation in the San Luis Valley. Along with power generation based on clean energy the federal government is looking to rebuild the nation's electrical power transmission grid as well as a part of its economic recovery plan.

However many that attended the meetings voiced concern that the companies failed to show a necessity for the new transmission line project. Al Tucker who lives at the Major's Ranch subdivision says the companies are presenting an unnecessary redundancy.

"We already have high voltage lines running north to south; they could use the same corridors. But what it appears they're attempting to do is build a new corridor."

"I mean we talk about urban sprawl. Why keep going into different areas building new corridors for them? I think that's the part most people are concerned about," Tucker said.

The project will see 95 miles of high voltage transmission lines, strung by Xcel, going over the Sangre de Cristo Mountains from the San Luis Valley to the Calumet substation that will built just north of Walsenburg by Tri-State. Tri-State will run another 45 miles of line from the Calumet substation to the Comanche substation in Pueblo.

"There are two issues these two companies have failed to answer as far as I'm concerned," David Gnaizda a resident in northwest Huerfano County said.

"First they've failed to show the necessity for the transmission lines and second they haven't addressed the issue of the loss of thousands of dollars in intrinsic value to the area because of the lost beauty caused by their transmission lines and towers."

## **B-028-001: Comment Noted (In Review)**

Your email/letter/comment form has been received and your comment noted.

The Environmental Impact Statement is anticipated to be completed in late 2010 and will be available at <http://www.usda.gov/rus/water/ees/ea.htm>.

US highway 160, a proposed corridor for most of the routing of the lines, was designated a scenic byway in June of 1998. Gnaizda says this designation keeps certain kinds of development out.

“That means that there can’t be any motels, transmission lines, or bill boards along the highway. The designation protects the natural beauty of the byway in perpetuity. This is a unique geological area. People come from all over the US and the world to see and experience what we have here.”

The scoping process will continue until Excel and Tri-State hold route refinement workshops in the fall of 2009. In the fall of 2010 public meetings and comments will be taken on the environmental assessment of the project with a project decision being determined in the winter of 2010.

The reason for the federal review process is the companies are requesting the USDA Rural Utilities Service to provide financial assistance of up to \$180 million for the project. But before a decision can be reached by the RUS an environmental assessment has to be conducted to determine the effects of the project on human, biological, and physical resources along with the effects on historic properties.

Along with several federal agencies that are involved with the permitting process there are four state agencies and the local municipalities and counties which will also be involved with permitting on land use, construction, and crossing permits.

“There will be plenty of opportunity for people to register their comments about this. The process is involved and will take some time to complete,” Brad Jones, Public Affairs Manager with Tri-State said.

\* Received from William Knowles on August 26, 2009.